United Nations S/2003/1148

Security Council

Distr.: General
9 December 2003

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

For the period 19 June 2003 to 9 December 2003

I. Introduction

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during the last six months pursuant to the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended in subsequent resolutions, most recently resolution 1488 (2003) of 25 June 2003.

II. Situation in the area and activities of the Force

2. During the period under review, the ceasefire in the Israel-Syria sector was disrupted on 5 October 2003 by an Israeli air strike on a target north-west of Damascus. The area of operation of UNDOF remained generally quiet, except in the Shab'a farms (Area 6), which experienced increased activity originating from the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which will be described in my forthcoming report on UNIFIL.

3. UNDOF supervised the area of separation by means of fixed positions and patrols to ensure that military forces of either party were excluded from it. The Force also carried out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the areas of limitation. Liaison officers from the party concerned accompanied the inspection teams. As in the past, both sides denied inspection teams access to some of their positions and imposed some restrictions on the Force's freedom of movement. In addition, Israeli national customs officials continued to operate at the Israel Defense Forces post at the UNDOF crossing gate between Israeli-occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

4. The Force continued to assist the International Committee of the Red Cross with facilities for mail and the passage of persons through the area of separation. Within the means available, medical treatment was provided to the local population on request. During the last six months, UNDOF assisted in the crossing of 462 students and 209 pilgrims and four persons in need of medical care. In addition, UNDOF provided protection at seven weddings and supervised the handover of a Syrian national who had crossed into the occupied Golan.

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5. In the area of operation, especially in the area of separation, mines continued to pose a threat to UNDOF personnel and local inhabitants. Owing to the age of the mines and their deteriorating explosives, that threat is significant. UNDOF continued to support the United Nations Children's Fund in activities to promote mine awareness among the civilian population.

6. The Force Commander and his staff maintained close contact with the military authorities of Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. Both sides generally cooperated with the Force in the execution of its tasks.

7. As of 30 November, UNDOF comprised 1,046 troops, including national support elements, from Austria (365), Canada (188), Japan (45), Poland (353) and Slovakia (95). In addition, 78 military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) assisted the Force in carrying out its tasks. UNDOF successfully completed the next phase of its three-year modernization programme. A map showing the deployment of the Force is attached to the present report.

III. Financial aspects

8. By its resolution 57/324 of 17 July 2003, the General Assembly appropriated the amount of $41.8 million gross, equivalent to $3.5 million gross per month, for the maintenance of the Force for the period 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2004. Should the Council decide to extend the mandate of the Force beyond 31 December 2003, as recommended in paragraph 13 below, the cost of maintaining the Force will be limited to the amounts approved by the General Assembly.

9. As at 19 November 2003, unpaid assessed contributions to the UNDOF special account for the period from the inception of the Force to 30 September 2003 amounted to $26 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at the same date amounted to $1,559 million.

IV. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

10. The Security Council, while deciding in its resolution 1488 (2003) to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months, until 31 December 2003, also called upon the parties concerned to implement immediately resolution 338 (1973), and requested the Secretary-General to submit, at the end of the period, a report on the developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement that resolution. The search for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East and, in particular, the efforts undertaken at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973) were dealt with in the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Middle East (A/58/278), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 57/111 and 57/112 of 3 December 2002.

V. Observations

11. The situation in the UNDOF area of operation has remained generally quiet, although tension in the Israel-Syria sector has been high since the Israeli air strike of 5 October, which I strongly deplored. I urge both parties to respect international law

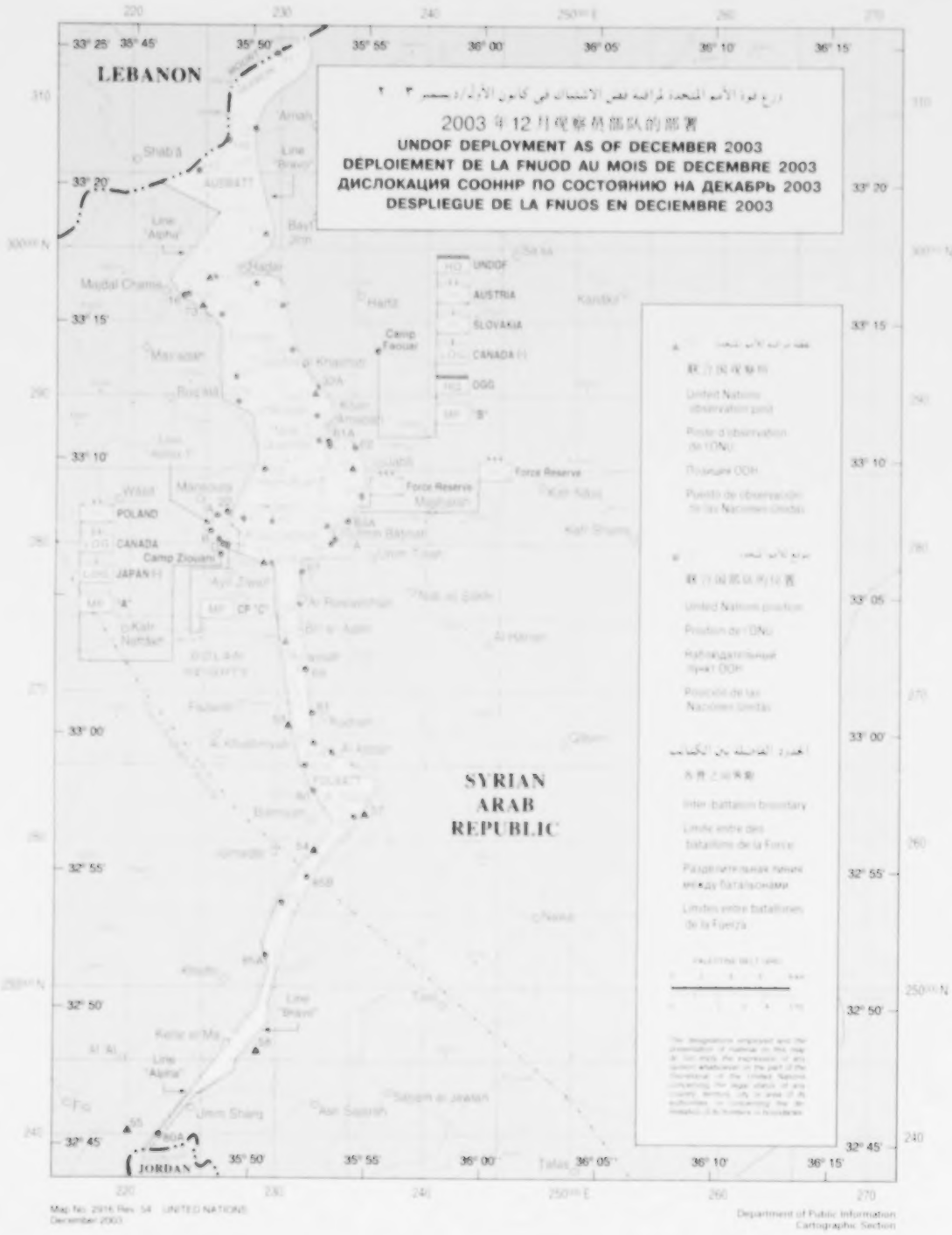
and to exercise restraint. The situation in the Middle East is very tense and is likely to remain so unless and until a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached. I hope that determined efforts will be made by all concerned to tackle the problem in all its aspects with a view to arriving at a just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973).

12. UNDOF, which was established in May 1974 to supervise the ceasefire called for by the Security Council and the agreement on disengagement between Syrian and Israeli forces of 31 May 1974, has continued to perform its functions effectively, with the cooperation of the parties.

13. Under the prevailing circumstances, I consider the continued presence of UNDOF in the area to be essential. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Force for a further period of six months until 30 June 2004. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel has also expressed its agreement.

14. In making this recommendation, I must draw attention to the shortfall in the funding of the Force. At present, unpaid assessments amount to some $26 million. That sum represents money owed to the Member States that contribute the troops who make up the Force. I appeal to the Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full and to clear all remaining arrears.

15. In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to Major General Gagor and to the men and women serving with UNDOF. They have performed with efficiency and devotion to duty the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Governments contributing troops to UNDOF and to those that provide the UNTSO military observers assigned to the Force.



Map No. 2916 Rev. 54 UNITED NATIONS
December 2003

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